

**DEFENSE DEPARTMENT SPECIAL BRIEFING WITH ADMIRAL MICHAEL
MULLEN, U.S. NAVY, CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF**

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ADM. MULLEN: Good afternoon. Thanks for being here today. I have a few comments on Pakistan to start out with. And then I'll take your questions.

As you know, there was a cross-border fire incident yesterday between a United States and Afghan patrol and a Pakistan military outpost. And of course, our thoughts and prayers still go out to all those who feel victim to the bombing at the Marriott Hotel recently in Islamabad.

I met, only a few days before that bombing, one of the two U.S. military personnel killed at the hotel, Air Force Major Rodolfo Rodriguez. He was an exceptional young man, only 34 years old, and he was proud of his service. And I mourn his loss.

Things are very tense and very dangerous in Pakistan. I wouldn't expect anything else. They face a growing and increasingly lethal insurgency on the border and inside their country, threatening the security of their newly elected government.

They are dealing with extremist safe havens in the FATA, many of which are sheltered by local tribesmen. And like so many other nations around the world, they confront economic woes that undercut their efforts to improve living conditions for their citizens.

That doesn't mean the sky is falling and it doesn't mean we should ever overreact to the hair-trigger tension we are all feeling. Now more than ever is a time for teamwork and for calm. It's time to recognize that we all -- Pakistan, Afghan, American and others in the region -- share a stake in a safe and secure Pakistan.

That's why I've visited so many times with my counterparts there. And despite the violence of the last few days, it's why I remain convinced that Pakistan's military leaders understand the nature of the threat and are working hard to eliminate it.

These things take time.

And we've learned ourselves you don't take an Army that was built to fight a conventional war and turn it into an effective counterinsurgency force overnight. And you don't defeat extremists or their ideologies solely with military power.

I've got the joint staff working on a review of our military strategy for the entire border region, not simply Afghanistan and Pakistan, but for both sides, not simply to identify problems, but to find multilateral solutions.

I was encouraged to hear Minister Wardak's suggestion of a joint Afghan-Pakistani force to patrol the border. Though much would need to be flushed out, it is precisely that sort of cooperation we need. Quite frankly, I believe some of the best solutions we may find are those not tied to military power but rather to economic aid and assistance and other whole-of-government approaches. No one stands to gain from misunderstanding between us or -- misunderstandings between us, or harsh rhetoric or open conflict, no matter how inadvertent. We are all fighting the same enemy.

Q Admiral, considering the shootings that have occurred, the cross-border firing that occurred, how do you go about preventing such misunderstandings? And what conversations have you had over the last several days, if any, or other people within your command, with the Pakistanis to prevent such misunderstandings from happening? And I guess as a follow-on to that, don't incidents like that suggest that any type of joint force monitoring the border are very unlikely and not going to happen?

ADM. MULLEN: Actually, in my meetings with General Kayani we've talked about this and what certainly possibilities are. There's a deconfliction mechanism that exists right now and has for some time, with liaisons on both sides of that border, and there are communications set up to do exactly that. What General Kayani and I have discussed in that regard is a continuing commitment to ensure that that deconfliction takes place.

There certainly is on the part of none of us from the leadership perspective any direction to get into any -- obviously, any kind of firefight. We've had incidents, the one I spoke to -- the one that occurred yesterday, that actually lasted -- my understanding of it -- it lasted about five minutes and then it was -- and it was -- both sides pulled away pretty quickly once it was understood what was going on.

And that's one thing, I mean, from my perspective.

But there is constant communication between our senior military representative there, Admiral Lefever, and the Pakistani military to look at these all the time and to work to continue to try to deconflict.

And in fact additionally, in addition to what I said about my meetings with General Kayani, we're working hard to better coordinate on both sides, on the Pak side, on the Afghan side. He's got fairly heavy operations going on right now in Bajaur and Swat. He has had. It is a longer-term goal to try to figure out a way to coordinate and synchronize operations there, and we're actually seeing an impact as far as insurgent flow into Afghanistan. We've seen a reduction recently with respect to that, because of, I think, the operations he -- the pressure he has put on the Pak side of that.

General McKiernan is involved. We've had tripartite meetings between Bismullah Khan, who's the -- who is my counterpart in Afghanistan, General McKiernan, as well as General Kayani. Those will continue.

So there's a significant effort going on to try to bring pressure on both sides and certainly deconflict when we -- and it's very close territory, very tough territory, close territory -- and all be focused on the same objective.

Q But just to follow up, is the deconfliction simply not working, or do you get the sense that there are Pakistani military that are ignoring or deliberately targeting the military helicopters? Because there were numerous reports, as you know, over the past week of shots fired that -- some were confirmed and some --

ADM. MULLEN: Exactly. Some were confirmed, and some were not. The only thing I would say to that is there is an extraordinary amount of work going on to make sure we're focused on the same objective and that we deconflict any interaction between the United States military or coalition forces and the Pak mil.

David?

Q Can you give any specific instances in which this deconfliction mechanism has actually worked?

ADM. MULLEN: Sure. I mean, we have had -- we've had self- defense requirements for a long time in -- on the eastern -- on RC East in Afghanistan. And in fact the liaison officers, ours that are in Pakistan and Pak mil who are in Afghanistan, have in fact -- have been able to communicate and deconflict very rapidly.

Obviously because of the proximity and the difficulty to train, it can be tough, and there can be misunderstandings. There's also -- there have also been incidents where the insurgents were very close, from a proximity standpoint, on the Pak side, taking us under fire, taking -- I'm sorry -- coalition forces under fire on the Afghan side, and sorting that sometimes can be very difficult as well.

So it's not perfect. I'm not saying that. I'm just saying that there's an awful lot of work going on to minimize and actually eliminate any kind of occurrence with respect to that.

Q Well, but Admiral, if I could just follow with a slightly different question --

ADM. MULLEN: Go ahead.

Q -- you've been talking for some time about the need for three additional brigades in Afghanistan.

ADM. MULLEN: Correct.

Q And then General McKiernan started talking really about four brigades, the one that is going in January, February, plus three more. How did that extra brigade sneak in there, and what is it for?

ADM. MULLEN: When -- there's been a shortfall in a training requirement -- it's about a brigade size -- for a significant period of time. When General Schloesser got there as CT- -- as CJTF-101, he identified an additional brigade combat team -- actually, it was two counterinsurgency battalions. And in fact the way we're going to meet that is with this brigade which has being re-missioned from Iraq to Afghanistan -- to Afghanistan.

And in addition, General McNeill, before McKiernan was there -- so that's two of them -- General McNeill, before General McKiernan was there, and General McKiernan reaffirmed -- even though it had not been officially submitted by General McNeill, it now has been for the two- star -- two combat brigades in the south and a two-star headquarters. That's how I get to four.

Q Admiral, if I can just follow up again on this question of the cross-border incidents --

ADM. MULLEN: Sure.

Q -- what is your understanding or have you been given any assurances about what orders the Pakistani troops along the border had in terms of firing on U.S. helicopters? I mean, ostensibly, the United States and Pakistan are allies, and if -- and I understand the U.S. military insists that the incident yesterday -- both of the American helicopters were on the Afghan side of the border. But assuming that there was an encroachment, accidental or otherwise, why would an ally of the United States' first response be to fire on them? Have you been given any assurances that that -- those are not the orders that the troops have? Or do you think that they -- there are some troops along the frontier who have orders to fire?

ADM. MULLEN: I've been given assurance by the senior military leadership in Pakistan that there is certainly no intent or plan to fire on our forces, first of all. Secondly -- and this was really a public announcement or, I think, a press statement by the -- one of the Pakistani military spokesmen, a major general, who said we reserve the right to defend ourselves. I mean, that's the same statement anybody -- same kind of statement we make with respect to self- defense. There's nothing -- to my knowledge, there's nothing out there beyond that.

Q Well, if a Pakistani helicopter were to stray across the border into Afghanistan, would U.S. troops fire?

ADM. MULLEN: That's speculation, clearly.

Q I think the answer's probably -- I mean, wouldn't you expect that an ally, if there was an accidental encroachment of airspace, would protest or do something else other than open fire on us?

ADM. MULLEN: Again, I'm -- I don't want to speculate beyond what I've said right now.

Again, I've met with the senior leadership there on this issue and I am reassured that the direction is the right direction for Pakistani military.

Tom?

Q Thank you. A question on Russia, if I could. The Russian president today announced a new strategic modernization program -- (off mike) -- out to 2020, enhanced deterrence, nuclear submarine, and some kind of vague notion of air and space defenses. Yesterday the Russians signed a cooperation deal with Venezuela for business and military. If you have any specifics on the deal, I'd love to hear about it, but more strategically, how do you assess these new Russian statements? Is there a new and growing threat, or is this just the rational response of another country?

ADM. MULLEN: Well, actually, my own experience, Tom, is that when I dealt with my counterparts, when I was head of our Navy, with the head of their Navy, it was very clear to me that their intention was to modernize their strategic forces. I reaffirmed that when I met with my counterpart, their chief of Defense, General Baluyevsky, in December.

So, having not seen the details, and I haven't, my -- this is consistent with where, at least from my interchanges with my counterparts, the Russian military was going as far back as a couple of years ago. You talk about the recent -- or you haven't said specifically, but the upcoming exercises, the deployment of Russian ships to Venezuela, the bombers that were recently there. And clearly, those two countries certainly -- they can work together if they see fit. I don't -- I just don't consider that a really significant threat at this particular point in time.

Q (Off mike) -- mechanism in place for quite a while along the border, Pakistan and Afghanistan, to deconflict problems, the liaison officers. How low a level do those liaison officers go? And what organizational level do they get assigned to?

ADM. MULLEN: I met --

Q (Off-mike.)

ADM. MULLEN: I met with very junior -- junior officers who are there, who are in direct contact with, say, the American liaison officers from General Schloesser's unit, when I was in Peshawar on one of my trips several months ago, not the last trip or anything like that.

So it's been in place for some time.

I'd have to -- I don't know how long it's been there. But it's junior to senior. And we recognize the requirement to be able to respond quickly. So that is a main focus of those liaison officers and it's been since they got there.

Q Do you think or could you tell us whether there have been any sort of orders given to U.S. flyers, who are flying alongside the border there, to perhaps give themselves a little greater standoff distance from the border, as a result of these tensions?

ADM. MULLEN: (Off mike.)

Q Admiral, any comment on the reports of a U.S. UAV being shot down inside of Pakistan?

ADM. MULLEN: There was not a U.S. UAV.

Q Admiral, have you received any sort of explanation from the Pakistani military about why the shooting began in the first place? And given the fact that we've now gone from reports of a shooting to a confirmed shooting, does this signify that tensions along the border are ratcheting up and that the U.S. may be constrained from acting to protect its troops in Eastern Afghanistan?

ADM. MULLEN: I don't think the U.S. will be constrained at all in protecting its troops first of all.

Secondly the incident happened yesterday. I haven't seen all the details of it. And I've not talked to my Pakistani counterparts. I don't have any additional information with respect to that. I've seen some reporting. But I think it's too early to tell, at this point, exactly what happened.

Q I have two questions. I want to come back.

You say you haven't talked to your Pakistani counterparts. When you said before that you have reassurances that, before this incident, you have, am I correct?

ADM. MULLEN: I was there last week.

Q Right. But you have received no communication or reassurances from the Pakistanis since this shooting incident across the border.

ADM. MULLEN: No. But I have good reassurance from Pakistani military leaders that, you know, where we were and, in fact, there were reports of an incident which occurred a couple days before I saw him, so it's, before I saw, met with General Kayani.

So this is very relevant. It's something we're focused on. And I find no need, based on my discussions and the assurances so far, to pick up the phone and talk to him to, you know, see if we're not understanding each other.

I think we understand each other very clearly.

The direction and guidance are very clear.

And I think it's probably back to the question on ratcheting up. It's a pretty tense place. The safe haven has gotten safer this year. The insurgency has gotten more sophisticated. So there is a significant additional focus compared to where we were, particularly the need for the Pakistani military to move on the Pak side. And I give great credit to General Kayani and to the leadership of Pakistan, who has decided to do this.

Q Can I just ask you the question I was going to ask you? That was really the follow-up part. Much of the world right now --

Q (?) (Request ?) number two.

Q (Off mike) -- two. But the --

Q (?) This is the real question.

Q This is the real question.

Much of the world, of course, right now is focused on the financial crisis.

ADM. MULLEN: Sure.

Q And one can only suspect that troops are watching around the world on TV and feeling some level of concern about this. Sort of two parts -- I mean, you know, if troops are concerned about the financial crisis in the U.S., what do you say to military families?

But deeper than that, do you have any concerns that adversaries could be taking -- thinking they could take advantage of this period of time, or that this might put pressure on Defense spending and make less money available to the U.S. military?

ADM. MULLEN: One of the things that is rock-solid, as far as I'm concerned, in these two wars that we've been fighting, outside agreements or disagreements specifically with respect to the wars, is the American Congress and the American people, through the American Congress, has funded these wars and funded support for our men and women in uniform. And I look to the future with confidence that that will continue.

We can always get in a discussion about is the budget going to go up or down and those kinds of things.

And at the same time there's been very, very strong support from this administration, from Congress and to the -- and directly, as far as I'm concerned, from the American people, with respect to supporting our men and women in uniform.

Q Adversaries?

ADM. MULLEN: I've seen nothing with respect to that.

Q Sir, with regard to the Pakistan, Afghanistan strategy review that the White House is leading, it's been characterized in different ways.

I wondered if you could define how you see it. How do you contrast the current strategy with what potentially would come after -- I think most importantly is what can be achieved in the final months of the administration, in terms of brand-new approach in that region?

ADM. MULLEN: In my own view of where we are, and certainly as I've focused on this heavily over the last year, I think it's very important that we not just focus on Afghanistan, but include, you know, a broad-based focus on Pakistan, because I think they are very much interwoven and actually have been that way for a long time. So that's one piece.

And I don't just mean on the border. I mean a broad relationship -- comprehensive relationship -- not just with Afghanistan but with Pakistan, and in the case of Pakistan, something that goes beyond -- certainly, from a budget standpoint, goes beyond one year. There are a couple proposals on the Hill that -- one is -- Senators Lugar and Biden have put forward. There is a proposal on the House side as well that I think is very important that gives some predictability and some long-term commitment. And certainly included in this is the need to focus -- focus on the border, but it's broader than that.

And I've spoken -- I think there needs to be a piece of this with looks -- which looks at -- sorry -- the relationship of India to all this, again, a country -- all three of these countries have relationships and histories and we need to be mindful of all that and inclusive, I think, in terms of trying to figure out the best way ahead.

And then I would also say we constantly are trying -- are looking at do we have the strategy right. And so it's very clear that the violence has gone up. The insurgency is better. We've got the safe haven. We've got a significant poppy problem. We've got an international coalition there, not just ISAF, but 42 countries. And so it's really in the totality of all that that I thought it was important we look at the military strategy. And obviously the White House feels very strongly that it should be reviewed as well.

So we're working that. We're all working that together at this point. And the issue of, is this the time? As far as I'm concerned, it is, no matter what, you know, what the timeline might be.

Q Given that somebody can come in, in four months, and present you a whole new set of ideas, to what end is it --

ADM. MULLEN: I mean, from my perspective as the senior military adviser, it is, it is the strategic look that, have the important pieces. And clearly it will be done in time to make recommendations to a new president, whoever that might be.

Tony.

Q One budget follow and then I have a Pakistan but a quick budget follow.

It's one thing to say the American public and Congress have been rock solid about Defense spending. But you've been pushing for 4 percent GDP as the baseline for the budget.

Are you concerned at all that the financial crisis and the bailout would largely jeopardize reaching that goal?

ADM. MULLEN: It is, it, the 4 percent discussion has been a focal point for me, not, and I've talked about a 4 percent floor, which is my estimate of what I think we need at a minimum. But more importantly it has been a goal to have a discussion, which I think we need to do, and a debate about how much we should invest in a -- as a country in national defense in a very, very uncertain, unpredictable and dangerous time.

So I'm not hung up on 4 percent as an exact number as much as I am being able to focus to try to have a discussion on, what should we invest with respect to our national security? And I recognize there are huge challenges out there, not the least of which is the current financial crisis.

There are looming challenges with respect to overall fiscal requirements for our country. And national security and what we're going to spend in the future is a big part of that.

Q One quick Pakistan question, the elephant in the room here, the U.S. cross-border unilateral attacks.

ADM. MULLEN: Right.

Q Can you give the American public a feel for the scope of these and most importantly whether the Pakistan military that you talked to last week were concerned about these attacks, incursions?

ADM. MULLEN: Not, not unlike other questions that focus on operations, I try not to talk about operations in these briefings and won't do that here as well.

Yes, ma'am?

Q You know, in the last several months you've spent a lot of time in Pakistan. You've met with General Kayani numerous times. And yet incidents like yesterday continue to happen. There are these cross-border problems and other incidents that haven't been confirmed in the media, but are out there. Are you frustrated by the situation there? Is -- that your efforts have not -- continue to have the problems we're facing in Pakistan?

ADM. MULLEN: Not at all. I recognize how complex this problem is. There is no easy near-term solution, one that is timed in months. I think it's going to take a lot longer than that. I'm impressed with what General Kayani has done, and the government of Pakistan, and they've been through some fairly significant political change over these many months, and that in particular they know their country. They know what needs to be done there, and he's moved -- I mean, if I were to look year to year, there are roughly 10,000 more troops from the Pakistani military that are west than this time last year, approximately.

So there is a commitment. It's going to take some time. It is an enormously complex problem that isn't -- that I don't think any of us can turn away from, in terms of both the severity of it and the need to deal with it.

Q But you said yourself that the safe haven has gotten safer in the last year with these additional troops. And what do you attribute that to? What's the main factor that's continuing to make that area so dangerous as a safe haven?

ADM. MULLEN: There hasn't -- there has not been a strong pressure put on that safe haven on the Pakistani side. We need additional troops on the Afghan side.

There are also foreign fighters, al Qaeda specifically, starting to flow there from Iraq. So there's -- it's been a combination of things, as well as, clearly, an intensified focus on Afghanistan, on the increased level of violence. And it's been -- so it's been the accumulation of all that I think starts to answer that question.

Yes?

Q On one hand, you're saying the Pakistanis are saying that they maintain, you know, the right to defend themselves and protect their sovereignty, but on the other hand, that there is no intention to get into any kind of a conflict. But could those two thoughts not be in conflict? And specifically, what is the guidance that has been given to those border forces that makes you feel reassured, while they're still maintaining the idea that they must protect their sovereignty and defend themselves?

ADM. MULLEN: The specific guidance is up to the Pakistani military leadership. What I am comfortable with is the assurance that the leadership has given me with respect to that, and the public statement about self defense is one that I certainly understand. The -- we need to -- and again, part of this is focus. Part of it is more forces on both sides. You know, we just need to both be mindful of the possibilities. I just am hard-pressed to see a set of circumstances where there would be any kind of sustained fight between two allies. I just don't -- that doesn't mean there wouldn't be accidents.

That doesn't mean that in fact what has certainly been reported to have occurred yesterday -- and again, I don't know all the details there -- didn't occur. But it didn't last very long. It was deconflicted. And again, back to this very tight space, very tough terrain, very tense time, I don't think, you know -- I'm not going to be totally surprised in the future if it continues to happen. We are working, doing everything we possibly can to make sure it doesn't.

Q On this question of additional forces, do you have any expectation that America's NATO allies will come up with any substantial additional forces next year, 2009?

ADM. MULLEN: Well, I think, actually, in fairness -- and there's been a lot of pressure brought on them over the last year. They've increased the number of coalition forces -- NATO forces from about 21 to 31. So they've added 10,000. Based on my interactions with my counterparts, and I've heard secretary of Defense say -- Secretary Gates say the same thing, that I don't have any great -- we don't have any great expectations that there are a lot more forces. There are some. I mean, some countries are committing to additional forces, but I certainly wouldn't -- best I can tell right now, wouldn't see it going up by another 10,000.

Q Admiral, on that, do you see -- Secretary Gates also mentioned that he wanted to be cautious about the size of the U.S footprint. He made that point at the hearing the other day. When you -- my understanding is that this last brigade was only validated fairly recently. The addition of -- well, it went from three to four -- (inaudible) -- was only validated recently. At what point do we get to that concern of how big the U.S. footprint is going to be? Are we already there, or --

ADM. MULLEN: We watch it very carefully. I mean, one of the things we've learned, certainly, in Iraq, is, you know, is we can expand a footprint very rapidly. We don't want to do that. We've got to have the footprint, which is the brigade plus the enablers, so that they can -- so that brigade and those forces, whether they're training or combat forces, can do the job. But it is something -- and I think Secretary Gates has sent a pretty strong signal -- that we've got to be mindful of.

And this is not just about a military effort. There's an economic piece here, a development piece here, a (rule of law ?) -- those things that we've learned, certainly, in the counterinsurgency fight in Iraq. And there are similarities and there are differences that we've, in fact, got to focus on with respect to Afghanistan.

Thank you.

Q I'm sorry, sir, we're out of time. (Laughter.)

ADM. MULLEN: Thank you. Jamie! Thank you.

Q (Off mike) -- we have to go. (Laughter.)

ADM. MULLEN: Thank you.

(Laughter.) Do you have any more questions?

Q I'm sorry. Basically, we're just out of time.